

*Remarks for the
"Safe School" Press Conference
February 28, 2003*

Good morning. As you all know, education is – and always has been – my passion and my priority.

My administration and I have worked hard to ensure every Mississippian benefits from our investments in education and that, in turn, our efforts to build good schools are realized through the growth of good jobs and good communities.

We all want the best for our children. We want them to go to schools in an environment that nurtures learning, and we want them to be safe in that environment as well.

Sadly, the world in which we live presents dangers to us all every day, particularly after September 11. Times have changed, and we must respond to the challenges of the times.

We have a responsibility to every parent and child in this state to make sure their schools are safe, and it's a responsibility we take seriously.

As part of our fulfillment of that responsibility, we have initiated a Safe School project in Mississippi. Developed and first implemented in Wisconsin by Risk Management Planning, this project has met with great success so far.

Former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, now secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, encouraged us to set up a pilot program here in Mississippi. A total of 12 schools around the state are currently participating.

To discuss in detail exactly what the Safe School program entails, I'd like to ask RMP President Paul Thomsen to make a few remarks. Paul?

(Paul Thomsen speaks)

As you can tell, this is a project that uses advanced technology to keep our greatest resource, our children, as safe as possible when they are getting their education.

Commissioner David Huggins from the Department of Public Safety and Robert Latham, executive director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency and the state's head of homeland security, have been involved with this project and can speak to the impact this plan can make from an emergency standpoint.

I also want to mention that I have spoken with Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge about this project during a meeting in Washington last December. He encouraged us to continue with the project, and we will be seeking federal dollars to assist in taking the project statewide.

The bottom line is this: Mississippi's greatest resource is found in schools across the state every day. We have to protect that resource and keep it strong for the future.

(Paul Thomsen will present a brief power-point presentation after the Q & A)